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## Americans Split on Energy vs. Environment Trade-Off

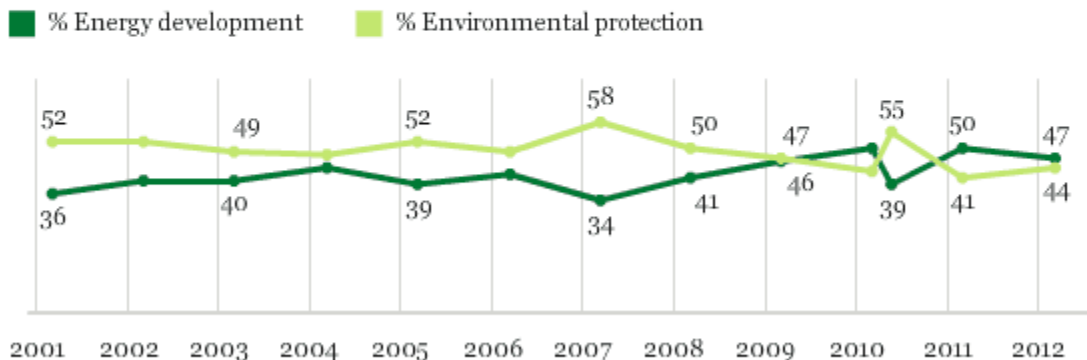
Forty-seven percent prioritize energy production; 44%, environmental protection

by Jeffrey M. Jones

PRINCETON, NJ -- Americans are about as likely to say production of energy supplies (47%) should be prioritized as to say environmental protection (44%) should be, a closer division than last year, when energy led by 50% to 41%. These views mark a shift compared with the early 2000s, when Americans consistently assigned a higher priority to environmental protection.

### *Energy Production vs. Environmental Protection*

With which one of these statements about the environment and energy production do you most agree -- [ROTATED: protection of the environment should be given priority, even at the risk of limiting the amount of energy supplies -- such as oil, gas, and coal -- which the United States produces (or) development of U.S. energy supplies -- such as oil, gas, and coal -- should be given priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent]?



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The greater preference for energy production over environmental protection in recent years likely results from the economic downturn, given that Americans have made economic matters their highest priority. There was a brief exception in [the spring of 2010](#), however, after the Gulf of Mexico oil spill brought environmental issues back to the forefront.

Although Americans still [view the economy as their No. 1 concern](#), they [perceive the economy to be improving](#). In this context, the public is now about evenly divided on whether energy development or the environment should be given priority.

These results are based on Gallup's annual Environment poll, conducted March 8-11. Rising gas prices, debate over government approval of the [Keystone XL pipeline](#), and President Obama's current energy policy tour highlight the importance of the energy issue. The Keystone issue in particular has reminded Americans about the trade-offs between increased energy production and risks to the environment.

Democrats and Republicans take opposing sides on the issue, with Republicans favoring energy development by 68% to 24% and Democrats preferring environmental protection by 56% to 34%. Independents' views are closer to those of Democrats, with 49% prioritizing the environment and 41% energy production.

Compared with 10 years ago, when Americans overall favored environmental protection by 12 percentage points (52% to 40%), all groups have moved in the direction of energy prioritization, though Republicans have shifted much more so than either independents or Democrats.

*Preference for Emphasizing Environmental Protection or Energy Production, by Political Party, 2002 and 2012 Gallup Polls*

	All Americans	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
<b>2002</b>				
Environmental protection	52%	63%	58%	37%
Energy production	40%	31%	34%	52%
Gap in favor of environment	+12	+32	+24	-15
<b>2012</b>				
Environmental protection	44%	56%	49%	24%
Energy production	47%	34%	41%	68%
Gap in favor of environment	-3	+22	+8	-44

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### **Public Assigns Higher Priority to Alternative Energy, Conservation Than Production**

Americans favor more environmentally friendly energy solutions when they are presented with various choices for addressing the nation's energy problems.

First, Americans are nearly twice as likely to say the United States should put greater emphasis on the development of alternative energy supplies such as wind and solar power (59%) as to say the U.S. should emphasize production of more oil, gas, and coal supplies (34%). This is the case even though Republicans are more likely to favor production of traditional energy sources over

alternative energy.

*Preference for Emphasizing Increased Production of Oil, Gas, and Coal Supplies or Development of Alternative Energy*

Which of the following approaches to solving the nation's energy problems do you think the U.S. should follow right now -- [ROTATED: emphasize production of more oil, gas, and coal supplies (or) emphasize the development of alternative energy such as wind and solar power]?

	All Americans	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
Alternative energy	59%	68%	67%	34%
More oil, gas, and coal supplies	34%	24%	27%	59%
Gap in favor of alternative energy	+25	+44	+40	-25

March 8-11, 2012

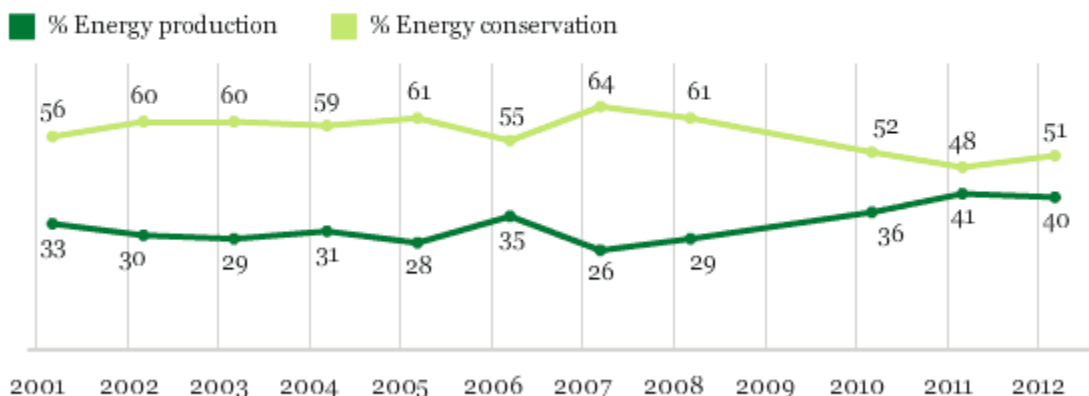
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Gallup found a 66% to 26% margin in favor of alternative energy among all Americans last year, the first time the question was asked.

Also, Americans continue to say the U.S. should emphasize energy conservation by consumers over increased production of oil, gas, and coal to address the nation's energy problems. However, the 11-point gap in favor of conservation this year (51% to 40%) is much smaller than it was from 2001-2008, when it averaged just under 30 points.

*Energy Production vs. Energy Conservation*

Which of the following approaches to solving the nation's energy problems do you think the U.S. should follow right now -- [ROTATED: emphasize production of more oil, gas, and coal supplies (or) emphasize more conservation by consumers of existing energy supplies]?



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The reduced gap in favor of conservation is due mostly to Republicans' changing preferences. Republicans currently prefer energy production by 63% to 29%. In 2002, Republicans said conservation should be emphasized over production, by 53% to 35%.

Independents have shifted slightly away from conservation, while Democrats' preferences are essentially the same as they were 10 years ago.

*Preference for Emphasizing Energy Conservation or Increased Energy Production, by Political Party, 2002 and 2012 Gallup Polls*

	All Americans	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
<b>2002</b>				
Conservation	60%	66%	62%	53%
Increased production	30%	28%	28%	35%
Gap in favor of conservation	+30	+38	+34	+18
<b>2012</b>				
Conservation	51%	67%	55%	29%
Increased production	40%	26%	32%	63%
Gap in favor of conservation	+11	+41	+23	-34

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## Implications

Americans now split about evenly when asked to choose between an emphasis on increased energy production and environmental protection. These preferences have varied in the past 11 years in response to changes in the health of the economy and to dramatic events such as the Gulf of Mexico oil spill.

Politics have also played a part in Americans' shifting preferences over the past decade, with Republicans increasingly coming down on the side of increased production of oil, gas, and coal. This likely reflects party leaders' preference for increased oil exploration in U.S. coastal areas and on U.S. land, which was a key focus at the 2008 Republican National Convention and more recently in calls by Republican presidential candidates and congressional leaders for the government to approve the Keystone XL pipeline.

But Americans as a whole show a proclivity for more environmentally friendly approaches to

dealing with the energy situation, including a greater focus on energy conservation or developing alternative energy supplies, even though Republicans take the opposing view.

### Survey Methods

Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted March 8-11, 2012, with a random sample of 1,024 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

For results based on the total sample of national adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the maximum margin of sampling error is  $\pm 4$  percentage points.

Interviews are conducted with respondents on landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Each sample includes a minimum quota of 400 cell phone respondents and 600 landline respondents per 1,000 national adults, with additional minimum quotas among landline respondents by region. Landline telephone numbers are chosen at random among listed telephone numbers. Cell phone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods. Landline respondents are chosen at random within each household on the basis of which member had the most recent birthday.

Samples are weighted by gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, adults in the household, and phone status (cell phone only/landline only/both, cell phone mostly, and having an unlisted landline number). Demographic weighting targets are based on the March 2011 Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older non-institutionalized population living in U.S. telephone households. All reported margins of sampling error include the computed design effects for weighting and sample design.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

[View methodology, full question results, and trend data.](#)

For more details on Gallup's polling methodology, visit [www.gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com).

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